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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8682
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1076
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8077
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6258
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4538
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2276
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8695
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2939

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SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: FIRST ROUND OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
SET FOR OCTOBER 8

REF: COLOMBO 854

¶1. (U) On September 16, the Election Commission announced that the first round of Maldives' first ever multi-party Presidential Elections will take place October 8. The announcement came after the Majlis passed the Presidential Elections Bill earlier the same day, clearing the last major legislative obstacle to holding the vote. Nominations for presidential candidates are now open and will close on September 21. Voting will take place on Maldives' 200 inhabited islands, at some tourist resorts and at four locations abroad. Final results should be available by 11:30 PM on October 9. The Election Commission announced that a second round, if required, would take place 10 days later. Post plans to send three embassy staff members to participate in the EU-led election observation mission for the first round and a similar number for the second round.

¶2. (SBU) The new constitution, signed into law on August 7, stipulates that a second round will be required if no candidate receives greater than 50 percent of the vote. Most observers believe that with seven or eight candidates likely to compete, a second round will be necessary. However, the Constitution states that voting should be complete by October 10. The Election Commission addressed this, however, saying that in its view a second round after October 10 would not violate the Constitution. Maldivian experts tell us that in all probability the still-unformed Supreme Court will need to intervene if this situation arises.

¶3. (SBU) A Colombo-based representative of the main opposition MDP told Ambassador on September 17 that the Election Commission had required MDP candidate Mohammed Nasheed ("Anni") to present a letter from court attesting that his 2001 conviction for stealing public property (he picked up some papers that were being thrown out from outside the former President's house) was not an offense under Shari'a law. Similarly, Republican Party candidate Gasim Ibrahim was required to show that his 1970s conviction for an illicit liaison was not a Shari'a offense. A disqualification of either candidate on these grounds would likely elicit widespread public protests. Embassy will monitor the outcome closely.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: President Gayoom's ruling DRP party and the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) appear

satisfied with this outcome, despite the abbreviated campaign calendar. On the other hand, Social Liberal Party candidate Ibrahim Ismail called the election process a "farce" because of the compressed schedule. MDP representatives claim their internal polling shows "Anni" and independent candidate Hassan Saeed in the top two positions, with President Gayoom third and Gasim in single digits. The MDP seems eager to hold an early vote before Gasim's Republican Party, which lacks a developed grassroots infrastructure, can gain momentum.

BLAKE